

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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TAGS: PN, PFOR

SUBJ: TORRIJOS' DESIRE FOR TREATY THIS YEAR

REF: A. PANAMA 3165; B. PANAMA 3166

SUMMARY: THE IMPORTANCE THAT TORRIJOS PLACES UPON THE SIGNING OF A TREATY THIS YEAR EVEN IF IT SUBSEQUENTLY ENCOUNTERS A DELAY IN THE SENATE HAS BEEN UNDERLINED AGAIN, THIS TIME TO AP CORRESPONDENT VICENTE MORALES BY A SPOKESMAN FOR TORRIJOS. SIGNING OF A TREATY BY PRESIDENT FORD WOULD BE A "GESTURE OF GOOD FAITH" WHICH WOULD EASE TENSE SITUATION - NEARLY AS BAD AS 1964 - THAT PANAMA IS NOW EXPERIENCING. MORALES, IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED MAY 30 IN PANAMA, ALSO DISCUSSED SOME TREATY ISSUES. EMBASSY CONCURS THAT POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN PANAMA IS TENSE. TORRIJOS' OPPONENTS ARE SEEKING TO EXPLOIT SIGNS THAT TORRIJOS IS SOFTENING HIS CANAL POLICY OR THAT THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS MAY BE FALTERING. WE BELIEVE THAT WITHIN CURRENT SITUATION IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO MAINTAIN TORRIJOS'S CONFIDENCE THAT AN ACCEPTABLE TREATY IS IN THE OFFING. SHOULD HE BECOME SUSPICIOUS THAT US EXECUTIVE IS WITHDRAWING FROM ITS COMMITMENT, HE WOULD

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HAVE TO MOE INTO A STANCE OF CONFRONTATION WITH US IN ORDER

TO PROTECT HIMSELF POLITICALLY.

1. PANAMA DATELINE STORY BY AP'S VICENTE MORALES CONCERNING CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS APPEARED IN "LA ESTRELLA" AND "STAR AND HERALD" MAY 30. MORALES, BASING HIS STORY ON AN INTERVIEW WITH AN UNNAMED "TOP ADVISER" WHO SPOKE WITH "FULL AUTHORITY OF GENERAL TORRIJOS," WROTE THAT TORRIJOS HOPES FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. THE SPOKESMAN WAS QUOTED AS SAYING: "THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT PRESIDENT GERALD FORD WILL SIGN THE TREATY THAT IS AGREED UPON BY THE NEGOTIATORS" AND THAT THIS IN ITSELF WILL MEAN "A GESTURE OF GOOD FAITH" EVEN THOUGH OTHER PROBLEMS MAY ARISE WHEN THE TREATY IS SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE FOR RATIFICATION. EXPLAINING WHY THIS WAS SO, THE SPOKESMAN SAID: "JUST THE SIGNING, THE RECOGNITION BY THE EXECUTIVE OF THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE HEARTENING STEP THAT WILL SOFTEN THE TENSE SITUATION WE ARE NOW GOING THROUGH." HE ALSO WARNED MORALES THAT "THE SITUATION IS BECOMING AS TENSE AS IN 1964" WHEN ARMED CONFRONTATION BROKE OUT.

2. EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR CONCRETE ACTIONS THE SPOKESMAN SAID: "STATEMENTS COME AND GO BUT PANAMANIAN CAN STILL BE ARRESTED BY CANAL ZONE POLICE AND TRIED UNDER AMERICAN LAW. WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS FOR AN AGREEMENT THAT WILL RECOGNIZE OFFICIALLY PANAMA'S RIGHT TO EXERCISE ITS SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE LAND, WATER AND AIR SPACE AT PRESENT OCCUPIED BY THE UNITED STATES, AND PATIENCE HAS A LIMIT." HE ALSO TOLD MORALES THAT THE GOP HAS INFORMATION THAT MANY RESIDENTS ON THE CANAL ZONE ARE BUYING ARMS. MORALES WROTE THAT A U.S. GOVERNMENT SOURCE HAD CONFIRMED THAT ARMS SALES HAD INCREASED DURING PAST TWO YEARS.

3. IN DISCUSSING TREATY ISSUES MORALES REPORTED THAT PANAMA WANTS THE IMMEDIATE RETURN OF TWO-THIRDS OF CZ TERRITORY, WHEREAS U.S. IS WILLING TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY ONLY ONE-THIRD. OF TREATY DURATION, HE WROTE THE U.S. WANTS 50 YEARS, AND PANAMA WILL NOT ACCEPT MORE THAN 25 YEARS. MORALES CITED PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED STATEMENTS BY TREATY ADVISER DIOGENES DE LA ROSA THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD GIVEN ASSURANCES TO FOREIGN MINISTER TACK IN WASHINGTON THAT "CONCEPTUAL AGREEMENTS" WOULD BE COMPLETED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITHIN 60 DAYS. HE ALSO SAID THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S STATEMENT (IN THE USIS VTR) THAT THE NEW TREATY WOULD PROVIDE FOR U.S. CONTROL OVER THE LAND, WATERS AND AIR SPACE NECESSARY FOR THE OPERATION AND DEFENSE OF THE CANAL WAS DESCRIBED BY GOP OFFICIALS AS "IRRITATING." THE SPOKESMAN TOLD MORALES THAT PANAMA WOULD GRANT "RIGHTS OF USE" FOR LAND, AIR AND WATER SPACE BUT WOULD NOT NEGOTIATE AWAY "SOVEREIGNTY" OVER THE ZONE.

4. COMMENT: THAT TORRIJOS PLACES GREAT IMPORTANCE UPON GETTING A DRAFT TREATY THIS YEAR, EVEN IF DELAYS WILL BE ENCOUNTERED IN GETTING IT RATIFIED, HAS BEEN MADE KNOWN TO U.S. OFFICIALS THROUGH A VARIETY OF CHANNELS, DIRECT AND INDIRECT, NOW INCLUDING THE AP. TENSION HAS BEEN INCREASING IN PANAMA RECENTLY AND EVIDENCE OF IT HAS BEEN BREAKING INTO THE OPEN IN THE FORM OF STUDENT PROTESTS, THE ATTACKS ON GOP CANAL POLICY BY RADIO IMPACTO, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S SLAP BACK AT RADIO IMPACTO (SEE REFTELS). TORRIJOS' OPPONENTS AND ULTRA-NATIONALISTS ARE READY TO EXPLOIT ANY SIGN THAT TORRIJOS MAY BE WAVERING IN HIS CANAL POLICY. A TIGHTENING ECONOMIC SITUATION, INCLUDING CONCURRENT INFLATION AND INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT, FURTHER COMPLICATES THE SITUATION. WITHIN THIS SITUATION IT IS IMPORTANT THAT TORRIJOS REMAINS REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT AN ACCEPTABLE TREATY IS BEING WORKED OUT. SHOULD HE BECOME SUSPICIOUS THAT THE U.S. EXECUTIVE IS ABOUT TO WAFFLE ON ITS 11-YEAR COMMITMENT TO PANAMA, HE WOULD HAVE LITTLE ALTERNATIVE BUT TO MOVE INTO A STANCE OF CONFRONTATION WITH THE U.S. THUS CONSOLIDATING NATIONALIST AND LEFTIST SUPPORT.

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